

Scherlen, Allan. "The World Stopped Watching," Directed by Peter Raymont, (First Run/Icarus Films, 2003) **Counterpoise**, 9:1 (Winter 2005) [Video Review]

The World Stopped Watching (documentary video). Directed by Peter Raymont. Produced by Peter Raymont, Harry Crooks & Lindalee Tracey. Co-Produced with the National Film Board of Canada. Distributed by First Run / Icarus Films. 2003. 82 minutes, \$440 (also available in a 52 minute version, \$390). Public exhibition rights included.

What are the moral obligations of war correspondents? Is their job simply to confirm the assumptions of their host government while providing some exciting, romantic and colorful entertainment for the evening news? The 1980s Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua and the subsequent war with the U.S. sponsored Contra army drew news media from around the world. Few journalists assigned to the war, however, showed much interest in the underlying causes or the real human costs of this dramatic conflict between a small developing country trying to make its way after suffering through a terrible dictatorship and a superpower bent on extinguishing what it saw a dangerous new socialist state. And once the excitement ended, as is the custom with foreign news correspondents, they checked out of their hotels, got on the plane to the next assignment and never looked back. The story of the aftermath, the suffering and the healing of war torn Nicaragua wasn't of interest to big media and went largely unreported.

In the documentary video, *The World Stopped Watching*, Bill Gentile, veteran Newsweek photographer, now a journalism professor, Randolph "Ry" Ryan, former columnist for the Boston Globe, and a Canadian journalist from La Presse return to Nicaragua fourteen years later to visit what has become of the revolution. They wanted to see if any of the ideals of the revolution remained and to see how Nicaragua's society had healed and evolved after years of civil war. On a personal level, the journalists hoped to find ex-Sandinista and ex-Contra fighters they had met and traveled with years before, and-- most importantly-- the peasants they had photographed and interviewed; people whose lives had been shattered by the loss of loved ones and the horror of war.

Amazingly, the journalists located a number of people they had photographed and interviewed in remote regions during the war. In an interesting sequence a peasant identifies a current politician among Bill Gentile's photographs of Contras who had massacred a wedding party. The journalists then located and interviewed the man in the photo and other ex-Contras who since have reconciled their wartime actions in their own minds. In the documentary, many people in Nicaragua have made peace and are now friends and neighbors with their former enemies though the hope of the revolution has rapidly faded. The governments that have followed the Sandinistas have been plagued with greed and corruption while many of the people suffer in poverty.

The World Stopped Watching is an important ethical critique of the journalist profession and the news industry. Today, as corporate media sees the job of journalists as simply parrots of government and corporate policy, it becomes crucial that students of journalism take a deeper and more independent interest in their role in the profession and have the courage, like Bill Gentile and Ry Ryan, to seek the truth when they do a story.

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